



## Teaching Empathy: The Story of Ruby Bridges

Grade Level: 1-4

### Objectives:

- \* To understand **empathy** and respond in appropriate ways by reading *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles.
- \* To recognize **courage** in others and ourselves.
- \* To form connections with others and practice empathy/courage in our daily lives.

### Time Frame:

Allow two weeks for the lesson. The first week is to build a background on courage and empathy. The second week is to read and write about *The Story of Ruby Bridges*.

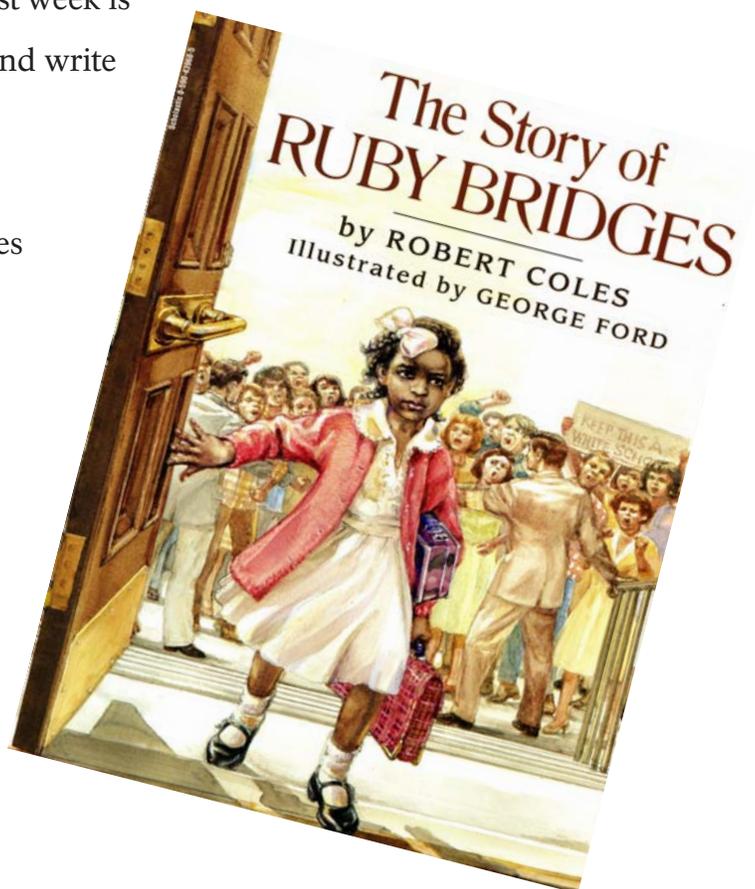
### Materials Needed:

*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles  
(Scholastic Books)

Paper

Pencils

Colors





Problem We All Live With, ca. 1973, by Norman Rockwell. Licensed by Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, IL.

## Background on Ruby Bridges:

(source: The Ruby Bridges Foundation, as first published in *Guideposts*, March 2000)

In 1960, Ruby Nell Bridges entered William Frantz Public School in New Orleans. She was the first African-American student to attend a formerly all-white elementary school. Born in Mississippi in 1954, Bridges moved from a farm to the city of New Orleans so that her parents could support their growing family.

By the time Bridges got ready to enter school, the city of New Orleans was ordered to desegregate in 1960. A test was given to African-American students. Those who passed would go to formerly all-white schools. Bridges passed the test and was selected to enter first-grade at William Frantz Public School. Bridges' mother supported this decision and saw it as an opportunity for a better education. However, her father thought they were "asking for trouble." In the end, after much prayer and discussion, Bridges' parents sent her to school. Her mother felt that she would be opening the door for many other African-American children.

On November 14, 1960, Bridges and five other African-American students were scheduled to enter the public schools in New Orleans. However, two decided to stay in their own schools and three were assigned to another school. Bridges would enter William Frantz alone.

Federal marshals drove Bridges and her mother to school on November 14, 1960. On the way, the marshals explained how they would walk into the school - two in front of her and two behind. Her mother reminded her, "Rubby Nell...don't be afraid. There might be some people upset outside, but I'll be with you."

Ignoring the shouts of the crowd gathered outside, Bridges entered the school and spent the whole day sitting in the principal's office. She never got to her classroom because of the noise! On the second day of school, Bridges was driven to school with her mother and met her new teacher - Ms. Henry from Boston. Bridges admitted not knowing how to react to a white woman as a teacher since she had never had one before. In her second-floor classroom, Bridges began learning her alphabet. The third day of school, Bridges' mother stayed home to go to work and look after her siblings. Her mother reminded her to pray and that she would be taken care of on the way to school.

Bridges prayed on her way to school and felt that this was her protection from people who yelled at her. After getting through the angry crowd, she was happily greeted by Ms. Henry, who sat Bridges near her desk and worked with her every day. Meanwhile, riots and protests shook the streets of New Orleans. Her family suffered as a result of attendance at William Frantz. Bridges' father was fired and the family could not shop at stores that they had been patrons of before desegregation. Her grandparents were asked to move from their farm in Mississippi.

Despite this, there were people who sent letters of support to Bridges and her family. A neighbor gave Bridges' father a job and other people babysat for her mother. Some people protected her as she rode to school in the federal marshals' car. The Bridges' commend those families who helped them and Ruby Bridges said that her favorite was Ms. Henry - who sat next to her and played with Bridges at recess since she could not go out onto the playground.

Bridges admits that through prayer, Ms. Henry, and the lessons of Martin Luther King, Jr., she learned never to judge people by the color of their skin since people are all made different. She also points to Dr. Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist, who helped her through the mob each day and talked to her about how her school days were going.

When Bridges returned to school the following year, Ms. Henry was gone - she had been asked not to return. There were a few more African-American students in attendance at William Frantz Public School and she did not have to be walked into class under the watch of federal marshals. Several years later, Bridges finished grade school at William Frantz and went to an integrated high school. Bridges then went to business school and became a travel agent. As an adult, Bridges married and now raises four sons. Today, she volunteers at William Frantz Public School and supported Dr. Coles in his writing of a book about her. In addition, the famed artist, Norman Rockwell, painted *Problem We All Live With* in 1973 that showed Bridges being escorted into school. This painting gained international fame. In 1995, Bridges reunited with Ms. Henry. Both began to speak across the country about integration, race relations, and how we can learn from lessons of the past.

To learn more about Ruby Bridges and the Ruby Bridges Foundation, visit the following web site <http://www.rubybridges.org>.

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## Teacher Notes:

## Process:

**Week One:** Choose from the following books and read during the first week in order to build a background on courage and empathy:

*The Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by David A. Adler

*I Am Rosa* by Rosa Parks

*Goin' Someplace Special* by Patricia A. McKissack

*A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman* by David A. Adler

*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by Judith Voirst

*Martin's Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport

*The New Girl at School* by Judy Delton and Lillian Hoban

*The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

*Thank you, Mr. Faulkner* by Patricia Polaco

*If Nathan Were Here* by Mary Bahr

*Streamlined Pig* by Margaret Wise Brown

*Harriett and the Roller Coaster* by Nancy Carlson

*Bravest Cat* by Laura Driscoll

*Fang the New Dog* by Barbara Hook Hazen

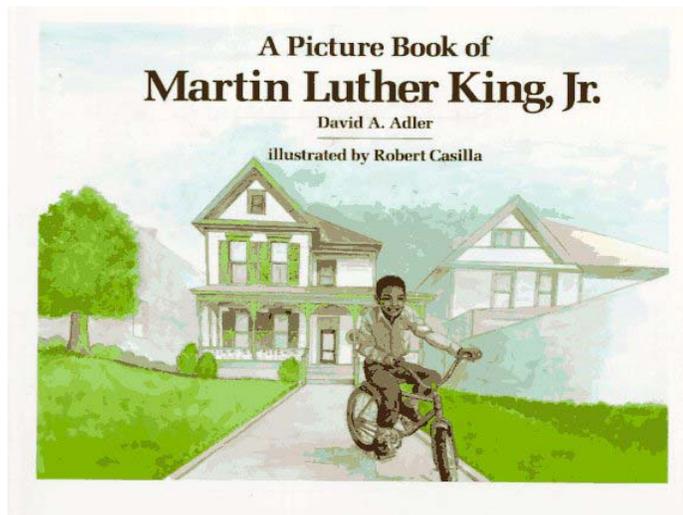
*Sheila Rae the Brave* by Kevin Henkes

*Long Haired Girl* by Doreen Rappaport

*Brave Irene* by William Steig

*All Alone After School* by Maurielle Stanek

*The Scarebird* by Sid Fleischman



### Suggested Activities for Week One:

- \* Allow student to chose book from this list to read.
- \* Student should illustrate traits in the book, including wants, needs, values of characters, etc. Note what the student has in common with the characters.
- \* Student shares their book and findings with the classroom.

**Week 2** - Conduct a shared reading of *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles and discuss the following words:

**mob:**

a large disorderly crowd or throng. The mass of common people; the populace.

**courage:**

the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution; bravery.

**judge:**

to form an opinion or evaluation; to act or decide as a judge.

**federal marshal:**

a U.S. federal officer of a judicial district who carries out court orders and discharges duties similar to those of a sheriff; a city law enforcement officer in the U.S. who carries out court orders.

**segregation:**

the act or process of segregating or the condition of being segregated; the policy or practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups (schools, housing, and public or commercial facilities), especially as a form of discrimination.

**nervous:**

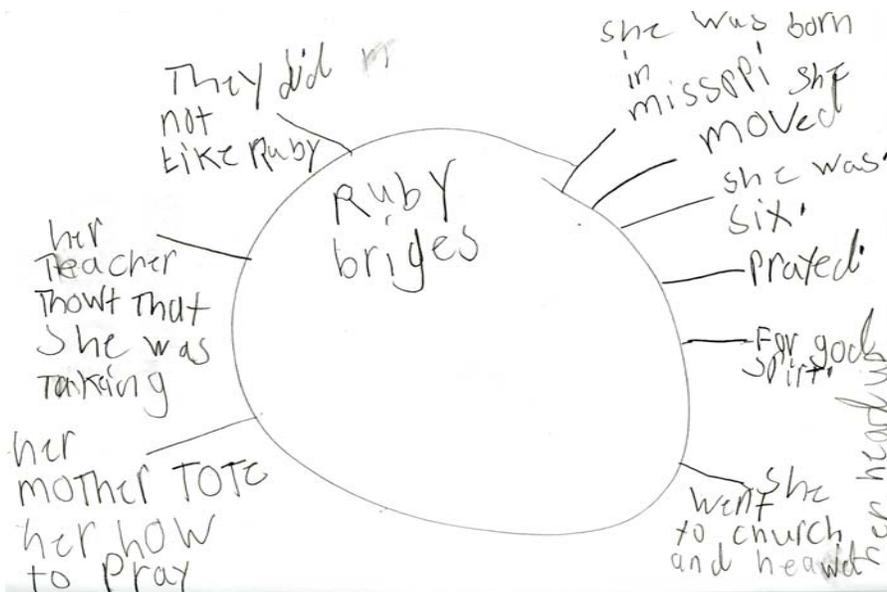
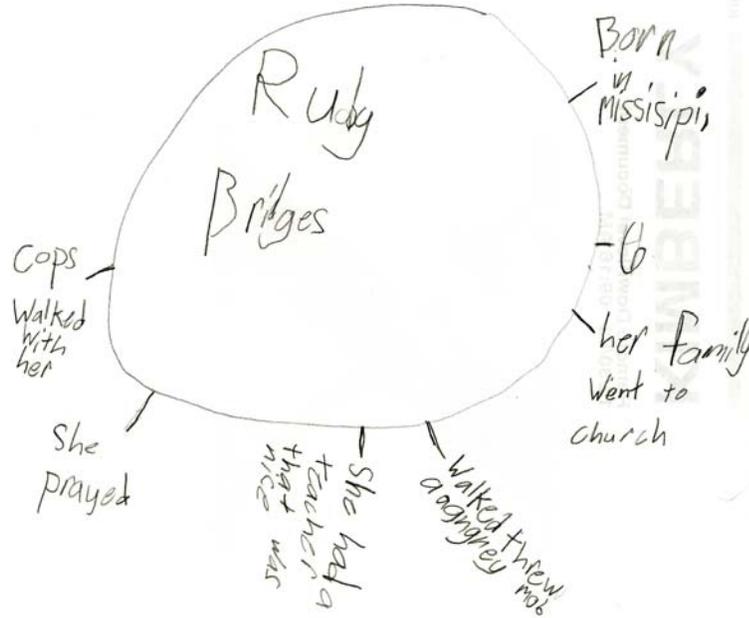
easily agitated or distressed; high-strung or jumpy; marked by or having a feeling of unease or apprehension.

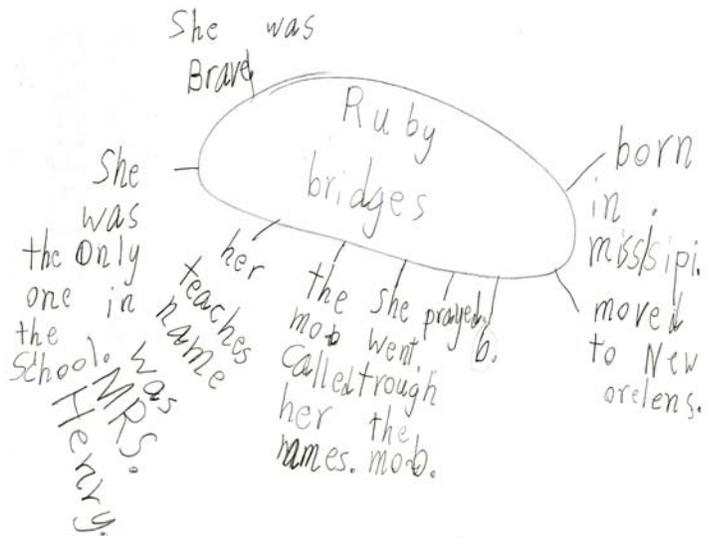
**empathy:**

identification with and understanding of another situation, feelings, and motives; the attribution of one's own feelings to an object.



After reading the books and understanding terms, create a **model story web** using *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Place the words 'RUBY BRIDGES' in the center of a circle and have the facts about Ruby coming out from the center of the web.





Model Story Web examples (pages 6 and 7): first-grade male, first-grade female, first-grade female in Ms. Blome's class. While these students accomplished creating successful model webs, it is suggested that this activity be saved for second-grade students and above. Some first-grade students spent a great deal of time on creating the circles rather than using the content of the story.

**Week Two:** Students begin shared writing about *The Story of Ruby Bridges* using the following writing prompt examples. After writing about Ruby Bridges, students should begin to fine-tune their work with several drafts:

- \* What do you remember about the story?
- \* Where did Ruby Bridges show empathy? Why did she?
- \* What did Ruby Bridges feel when she had to leave her grandparents' farm in Mississippi?
- \* How did Ruby Bridges' parents feel about her being the first African-American student going to an all-white school?
- \* When Ruby Bridges went to school, how do you think she felt when people were yelling at her? What did she do to help her get through the tough times?
- \* What emotions do you think Ruby Bridges had when she had to sit in class all alone?
- \* What (or how) do you think the other students at the school felt (or thought) about Ruby Bridges?
- \* How would you feel under such circumstances?

Writing Examples from Students at Gibbs Magnet:

A very long time ago there was a very little girl named Ruby bridges. Her father picked crops. Her family had to move when she was at the age of 4. Now she is 6. She went to the big white school. She was the first person to go in

that is black. She had to walk throo a angry mob everyday! They sent marshals that caryed guns to keep her safe a thing came in to pick the crops so her dad lost his job oh no! "Ruby said She went to school all alone with her teacher but everyday she walked right in with a smile on her face and she was doing

so good in things like math and  
reading. Every day she prayed  
befour she went into the big  
school then lots of people came  
in the big school!

First draft writing by first-grade female student in Ms. Tankersley's class.



a thing came in to pick the crops so  
 her safe. She went to school all day  
 alone with her <sup>nice</sup> teacher but every day  
 she walked right in with a smile  
 upon her face. ~~and~~ she was doing  
 so good in things like reading and  
 math. ~~Every~~ every day she prayed before  
 she went into the ~~big big big~~ school.

her dad lost his job  
 "oh no"  
 Ruby  
 smile  
 then  
 lots  
 of  
 people  
 came  
 in

Second writing draft based on writing prompt of first-grade female student in Ms. Tankersley's class on pages 10 and 11.

### Evaluation:

Using a rubric for grading, evaluate the students on the following:

- \* Responds appropriately to literature with new or enhanced awareness of traits, values, and empathy.
- \* Retells *The Story of Ruby Bridges* in order.
- \* Includes elements of empathy and courage in writing.
- \* Uses story web as an organizer for their writing.

The students will review and edit their writing for two days to make a final copy.

Authors of this lesson: Carolyn Blome, Abby Tankersley, and Katrina Adams, first- and fourth-grade teachers at Gibbs Magnet, Little Rock, Arkansas.



Gibbs Magnet first-grade students celebrate Ruby Bridges Day at the Williams Library, Little Rock, Arkansas (November 2004). NPS Photo

## Ties to Arkansas Department of Education Frameworks:

English (Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks 1-4 (revised 2003): (Speaking Vocabulary) OVI.1.1., OVI.2.1., OVI.2.2., OVI.3.1., OVI.3.2., OVI.3.3., PVI.4.1., OVI.4.2., (Speaking Behaviors) OVI.1.5., OVI.1.6., OVI.2.6., OVI.3.7., PVOVI.4.6., (Speaking to Share Understanding of Information) OVI.1.7., OVI.1.9., OVI.2.7., OVI.2.9., OVI.3.8., OVI.3.10., OVI.3.11., OVI.4.8., (Speaking for Literary Response and Expression) OVI.1.10., OVI.1.11., OVI.2.10., OVI.2.11., OVI.3.12., OVI.3.13., OVI.4.10., OVI.4.11., (Speaking for Critical Analysis and Evaluation) OVI.1.12., OVI.2.12., OVI.3.14., OVI.4.12., (Listening and Responding to Literature) OV2.1.4., OV2.2.4., OV2.3.5., OV2.4.4., (Listening for Critical Analysis and Evaluation) OV2.1.5., OV2.2.5., OV2.3.6., OV2.3.7., OV2.4.6., (Prewriting) W4.1.1., W4.1.2., W4.1.3., W4.1.4., W4.1.5., W4.1.6., W4.1.11., W4.2.1., W4.2.2., W2.2.3., W4.3.1., W4.3.2., W4.4.1., (Drafting) W1.7., W4.1.8., W4.1.9., W4.1.10., W4.2.4., W4.2.5., W4.2.6., W4.3.7., W4.3.8., W4.4.5., W4.4.6., W4.4.7., W4.4.8., W4.4.9., (revising) W4.1.12., W4.1.13., W4.2.7., W4.2.8., W4.2.9., W4.2.10., W4.2.11., W4.3.9., W4.3.10., W4.4.10., W4.4.11., W4.4.12., (Editing) W4.1.14., W4.1.15., W4.2.12., W4.2.13., W4.3.11., W4.3.12., W4.4.13., (Topics and Forms) W5.1.13., W5.1.4., W5.1.5., W5.2.3., W5.2.4., W5.2.5., W5.2.6., W5.2.10., W5.3.3., W5.3.4., W5.3.5., W5.3.6., W5.3.9., W5.4.5., W5.4.6., W5.4.9., W5.4.10., (Sentence Formation) W6.1.1., W6.1.2., W6.2.1., W6.2.2., W6.3.1., W6.3.2., W6.3.3., W6.4.1., W6.4.2., W6.4.3., W6.4.4., (Usage) W6.1.3., W6.2.3., W6.2.4., W6.2.5., W6.2.6., W6.3.4., W6.3.5., W6.3.7., W6.3.8., W6.4.5., W6.4.6., W6.4.7., W6.4.9., (Spelling) W6.1.4., W6.1.5., W6.2.7., W6.2.8., W6.2.9., W6.3.9., W6.3.10., W6.3.11., W6.3.12., W6.4.10., W6.4.11., W6.4.12., (Capitalization) W6.1.6., W6.1.7., W6.2.10., W6.2.11., W6.3.14., W6.3.15., W6.4.11.3., W6.4.14., (Punctuation) W6.1.8., W6.2.12., W6.2.13., W6.2.14., W6.2.15., W6.3.16., W6.3.17., W6.3.18., W6.4.15., W6.4.17., W6.4.18., W6.4.19., (Formatting) W6.1.9., W6.1.10., W6.2.16., W6.2.16., W6.3.19., W6.3.20., W6.4.20., W6.4.21., (Purposefully Shaping and Controlling Language) W7.1.1., W7.1.2., W7.1.3., W7.1.4., W7.1.5., W7.1.6., W7.1.17., W7.2.1., W7.2.5., W7.2.7., W7.2.8., W7.3.1., W7.3.2., W7.3.3., W7.3.4., W7.3.5., W7.3.6., W7.3.7., W7.3.8., W7.3.9., W7.3.10., W7.4.1., W7.4.2., W7.4.4., W7.4.6., W7.4.7., W7.4.8., (Utilizing Concepts About Print) R8.1.1., R8.1.2., R8.1.3., (Developing Phonological Awareness) R8.1.5., R8.1.6., R8.1.7., R8.1.8., R8.1.9., (Using Prior Knowledge to Make Meaning) R9.1.1., R9.2.1., R9.3.1., R9.3.2., R9.4.1., (Using Connections to Make Meanings) R9.1.2., R9.1.3., R9.2.2., R9.4.2., (Using Visualization to Make Meaning) R9.1.4., R9.2.3., R9.3.4., R9.4.4., (Using Questioning to Make Meanings) R9.1.1.5., R9.1.6., R9.1.7., R9.1.8., R9.2.4., R9.2.5., R9.2.6., R9.3.5., R9.3.6., R9.3.7., R9.4.5., R9.4.6., (Using Inferences to Make Meaning) R9.1.9., R9.2.7., R9.2.8., R9.3.8., R9.4.7., R9.4.9., (Determine Importance to Make Meaning) R9.1.10., R9.1.11., R9.1.12., R9.3.10., R9.3.11., R9.4.10., R9.4.11., (Summarizing and Synthesizing for Meaning) R9.1.13., R9.1.14., R9.2.10., R9.2.11., R9.2.12., R9.3.12., R9.3.13., RR9.3.14., R9.4.12., (Exhibit Behaviors and Habits of an Active Reader) R10.1.1., R10.1.2., R10.1.3., R10.1.4., R10.1.5., R10.1.6., R10.1.7., R10.1.8., R10.2.1., R10.2.7., R10.3.1., R10.3.6., R10.4.1., R10.4.6., (Meaning-Based Word Recognition) R11.1.1., R11.1.2., R11.1.3., R11.2.1., R11.2.2., R11.2.3., R11.3.1., R11.3.2., R11.3.4., R11.4.1., R11.4.2., R11.4.3., R11.4.4., (Sight Word Recognition) R11.1.6., R11.2.5., R11.3.8., R11.4.8., (Word Study and Vocabulary) R11.1.8., R11.2.7., R11.4.9., (Accuracy of Reading) R11.1.10., R11.1.12., R11.2.9., R11.2.10., R11.3.10., R11.4.11., (Reading with Fluency and Expression) R11.1.13., R11.1.14., R11.2.11., R11.2.12., R11.3.11., R11.3.12., R11.4.12., R11.4.13., R11.4.14.

For more information about curriculum or programs at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, contact the following:

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Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
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501-374-3067 (phone)  
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Lea\_Baker@nps.gov (e-mail)  
www.nps.gov/chsc (web site)

To schedule a guided tour of the historic site, please contact

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
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501-374-1957 (phone)  
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